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A Journalist Is a Journalist

What is the purpose of an American journalist? That purpose is to be a journalist, and nothing else. A journalist in the hire of the Central Intelligence Agency or any government agency betrays his own ethical responsibility and brings all other correspondents under suspicion.

After revelations several years ago that the CIA had employed news reporters as undercover intelligence operatives, we welcomed a policy change announced by the CIA in 1976. The announcement said with admirable clarity: "The CIA will not enter into any paid or contractual relationship with any full-time or part-time news correspondent accredited by any U.S. news service, newspaper, periodical, radio or television network or station."

Now Adm. Stansfield Turner, the CIA director, tells the American Society of Newspaper Editors that he sees nothing wrong with using reporters for

intelligence operations. He reminded them of what he had disclosed earlier this year—the CIA policy adopted in 1976 had been modified to permit the use of journalists by the agency with the approval of the director.

In three separate instances, he said, he had approved plans to use American reporters abroad for secret intelligence assignments, but the plans failed to materialize. However, he said, the agency will continue to consider using journalists when other options are not available.

Turner did make one essential point. He said the reputation and integrity of journalists depend on their performance. That is precisely the issue. A reporter who accepts a secret assignment, using his profession as a cover, undermines his own credibility, forfeits the trust of his news sources and compromises his news organization. □